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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002040

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DEPT FOR SA/INS, LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY, NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2013

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [UK](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOISTS ABDUCT AND RELEASE BRITISH ARMY OFFICERS

REF: (A) KATHMANDU 2022 (B) MALINOWSKI/DAS CAMP

10/20/03 TELCON

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary. On October 19, a group of armed Maoists seized four British Army Gurkha officers or employees, including one active duty British Lieutenant Colonel and two Nepali Gurkha retired officers, in Baglung District in mid-western Nepal. The insurgents reportedly harangued the group for "imperialist exploitation" of Nepali youth and forced the group to accompany them to Maoist district headquarters. The British Government decided not to inform or involve the Government of Nepal and launched its own search and rescue operation. On October 21, one of the Nepali abductees reportedly called the British recruitment office in Pokhara, saying that all four had been released and would be returning to Pokhara that same evening. The British Embassy is confident that the group will return safely to Kathmandu by October 22. The incident follows an upsurge in Maoist rhetoric and activity against British and Indian Army recruitment programs in Nepal, but marks the first time the Maoists have abducted a foreign government official. End Summary.

12. (C) According to British Charge D'Affaires John Chick, on October 19 at approximately 1800 hours in Baglung District in mid-western Nepal, one active duty British Lieutenant Colonel, two retired Nepali British Gurkha officers and one Nepali recruitment officer were accosted by a group of armed Maoist insurgents. (Note. The highest ranking abductee, Lt Col Adrian Griffith, is listed on the UK Embassy's diplomatic roster as Deputy Commander, Chief of Staff, HQ, BGN. This is at least the third time Maoists have targeted British Gurkha officials. The first incident occurred in September 2002 when insurgents kidnapped a Nepali employee of the British Welfare Office in Taplejung District in eastern Nepal. Another British Gurkha employee apparently was grabbed by the Maoists, but quickly released unharmed, about two or three weeks ago. End Note.) According to a BBC documentary film crew present at the site, the insurgents began to berate them ideologically, calling the group "imperialist exploiters" of Nepali youth. After the verbal confrontation, the Maoists forced the four officers to accompany them to the Maoist district headquarters, saying the group could expect to be released within seven hours. However, the insurgents allowed the BBC crew to depart. After reaching Baglung District headquarters by foot at approximately 1200 hours on October 20, the BBC crew contacted the British Embassy in Kathmandu to report the abduction.

13. (C) The British Embassy, in consultation with London, decided not to involve the Government of Nepal and requested that the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and National Police to refrain from launching search and rescue operations. Claiming they could handle the incident themselves, the British Embassy sent two teams from the Gurkha pension and recruitment offices in Pokhara (roughly 50 km east of Baglung) to locate and extract the victims. One team was sent to the designated rendezvous point where the British Army officers were to arrive on October 21, while the second team was sent to retrace the group's steps, ascertain their whereabouts and attempt to bring them out. Neither team was successful in making contact with the abductees. We expect that the GON and particularly the RNA will not be at all pleased that the British did not deem to formally inform the host government of this important incident.

14. (C) At approximately 1300 hours on October 21, the British Embassy received a telephone call from the British Army's recruitment office in Pokhara. The recruitment office had received a call just moments earlier from one of the Nepali victims, who said the group had been released and was on its way to Pokhara. John Chick said he was "99 -percent" confident that the group was safe and expects they will arrive in Pokhara this evening and return to Kathmandu for a debrief on October 22. Chick did not know where the group was or how the group had contacted the Pokhara recruitment center, although the Lieutenant Colonel did have in his possession a satellite telephone. Chick said they were not

certain whether the abduction constituted a warning to British Army recruitment programs in Nepal or whether it was perhaps a mistake by local Maoist commanders, unsanctioned by central leadership.

15. (C) Comment. Since early October, we have witnessed an upsurge in Maoist rhetoric and activity against British and Indian army recruitment programs. Last week, Maoists in Ilam District in eastern Nepal forced the closure of one British recruitment center after attacking two Nepali men seeking recruitment into the U.K.'s Gurkha Battalion (reftel). As such, it would not be surprising if the insurgents, even if only at a local level, had decided to interfere in the British recruitment effort by harassing and abducting recruitment officers.

16. (C/NF) Comment Continued: In addition, only last week British courts rejected a long-standing claim that Nepalese citizen British Gurkhas were discriminated against in pension benefits. While the British Government may have won the case on its merits, the decision stoked a round of complaints from the chatter classes, some Nepalese nationalists, and the predictable left. The British position was not helped by some of the local British rationalization on the case. For example, an argument that a retired Nepalese Gurkha captain receives more in pension benefits than the Nepalese Prime Minister does in salary.

17. (C) Comment Continued: Thankfully, it appears the abductees were released quickly and without harm. That said, the incident marks the first time the Maoists have abducted an foreign official. At this stage, it is unclear whether the incident was merely an aberration, perhaps perpetrated by an overzealous local commander, or indicates a change in Maoist policy at the central level. In either case, the incident poses a serious challenge to continued British recruitment efforts outside their main recruitment centers.
End Comment.
MALINOWSKI